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ABSTRACT

Body image is considered to be a multidimensional construct which includes evaluative and cognitive dimensions of physical appearance, physical fitness, health, and sexuality. Clearly, individuals differ in the degree to which they evaluate their body image and in the importance they place on their body image. This study was conducted to investigate the relationship between self-monitoring, gender, and body image. Undergraduate students (N=177) completed the Self-Monitoring Scale and the Body Self Relations Questionnaire. The results support the self-monitoring and gender hypotheses in that high self-monitors and females paid more attention to, and directed more behaviors toward their physical appearance than did low self-monitors and males, respectively. It was concluded that the importance placed on physical appearance by high self-monitors may be more general than previously demonstrated. Future research might examine the relationship between other personality variables and how these variables may interact with gender in understanding self-perceived physical appearance. (NB)

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Body Image, Self-Monitoring, and Gender

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between self-monitoring, gender, and body image. Undergraduates completed the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986), and the Body Self Relations Questionnaire (BSRQ; Winstead & Cash, 1984). Results supported the self-monitoring and gender hypotheses in that high self-monitors and females paid more attention to, and directed more behaviors toward their physical appearance than did low self-monitors and males, respectively. It was concluded that the importance place on physical appearance by high self-monitors may be more general than hitherto demonstrated. Implications for future research are discussed.

Body Image, Self-Monitoring, and Gender

Body image or the "physical self concept" (Noles, Cash, & Winstead, 1985), is considered by most researchers to be a multidimensional construct which includes evaluative and cognitive dimensions of physical appearance, as well as physical fitness, health, and sexuality. Clearly, individuals differ in the degree to which they evaluate their body image and in the importance they place on their body image (e.g., Noles, Cash, & Winstead, 1985).

Research conducted on self-evaluation has led researchers to conclude that a discrepancy between one's actual self and one's ideal self leads to negative affect (see Higgins, Strauman, & Klein, 1986). Further, an inability to change one's attributes to reach one's ideal state may lead to feelings of hopelessness (Adler, 1929/1964, cited in Higgins et al., 1986). Thus, body type or physical appearance is an attribute of significance as individuals who perceive an actual-ideal physical appearance discrepancy may not be able to change their physical appearance to reach their ideals.

One would assume that only those individuals for whom body image is important would be likely to experiencce negative affect given any discrepancy between their actual and ideal body image. It is critical then, as a first step in research on actual-ideal body image discrepancy, to identify variables which relate to the importance individuals place on their body image. We will consider two such variables, self-monitoring and gender. For the purposes of the present paper our investigation is restricted to physical appearance--considered by some (e.g., Tucker, 1985; Winstead & Cash, 1984) to be a principle component of body image. Indeed,

research has shown that women, compared with men: place more importance on their physical appearance (Jackson, Sullivan, & Rostker, 1986), reportedly engage in more appearance directed behaviors (Jackson et al, 1986), perceive a greater actual-ideal body concept discrepancy (Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin, 1986), and are much more likely to be bulimic--considered by some to be an affective disorder (Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin, 1986).

The notion that self-monitoring should relate to the importance that individuals place on their appearance is suggested by previous research. Snyder, Berscheid, & Glick (1985) showed that when males reviewed personal information about a potential dating partner, high self-monitors spent more time examining the photograph in this profile than did low self-monitors. In contrast, low self-monitors spent more time examining the personality profile than did high self-monitors. Further, high self-monitors tended to choose partners who were, on average, more attractive than those chosen by low self-monitors. In addition, high self-monitors, in comparison to low self-monitors, have been reported to place and respond to personal advertisements that emphasize the physical appearance of a potential dating partner (Omoto, DeBono, & Snyder, 1985).

If high self-monitors place greater importance on the physical appearance of other than do low self-monitors it follows that they should also place greater importance on their own physical appearance. However, these results also suggest the possibility that high self-monitors, in comparison with low self-monitors, emphasize the physical appearance of potential dating partners because they believe that they are more physically

attractive. This idea is consistent with the "matching phenomenon" (Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971; Huston, 1973).

It was hypothesized then, that high self-monitors would place more importance on their own physical appearance and would evaluate their physical appearance more favorably than low self-monitors. If it is the case that high self-monitors place more importance on their physical appearance than do low self-monitors, then high self-monitors should engage in more appearance-related behaviors than should low self-monitors. No specific predictions were made regarding the combined effects of self-monitoring and gender as none were suggested by previous research. We did however, expect females to place more importance on their physical appearance and engage in more appearance-directed behaviors than males, consistent with the findings of Jackson et al. (1986).

Method

Subjects

One hundred and seventy-seven undergraduates (109 females, 68 males) at Michigan State University participated in a questionnaire survey on "Perceptions of Self" for Introductory Psychology course credit.

Measures and Procedure

Subjects participated in one of two mixed-sex groups of approximately 85 persons supervised by a male and female experimenter. Participants completed the 18-item version of the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986), and the Body Self Relations Questionnaire (BSRQ, Revision III; Winstead & Cash, 1984). The BSRQ consists of 140 items which subjects respond to on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = definitely disagree, 5 =

definitely agree). Because the present paper was focused on the physical appearance dimension of body image, we were concerned with only the first three subscales of the BSRQ: evaluation of physical appearance, importance of physical appearance to the individual, and self-reported behaviors directed toward physical appearance.1 The presentation of the Self-Monitoring Scale and the BSRQ was counterbalanced.2

Results

Based on a median split (median = 10.25) of their Self-Monitoring Scale scores, we classified the participants as 48 males and 60 females high in the personality construct of self-monitoring (score $\geq$ 10), and 20 males and 49 females low in self-monitoring (score $\leq$ 9).

A composite score on each of the three Appearance subscales of the BSRQ was computed for each subject. The evaluation, importance, and behavior subscales were internally consistent (Cronbach alphas = .88, .91, and .84, respectively).

A 2(Sex) x 2(Self-Monitoring; low, high) multivariate analysis of variance was performed on the three subscales of the BSRQ. The multivariate effect was marginal for Self-Monitoring, $F(3,171) = 2.56$, $p < .06$; and significant for both Sex, $F(3,171) = 16.34$, $p < .001$; and the Sex x Self-Monitoring interaction, $F(3,171) = 3.46$, $p < .05$.

Two(Self-Monitoring) x 2(Sex) analyses of variance were performed on each of the three subscales. The means are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results for the analysis of the Evaluation subscale revealed a significant two-way interaction $F(1,173) = 8.05$, $p < .005$. Simple effects tests (Winer, 1971) revealed that high self-monitoring males evaluated their appearance more favorably than any other group (high self-monitoring females $F(1,173) = 22.92$, $p < .01$, low self-monitoring females $F(1,173) = 8.44$, $p < .01$, and low self-monitoring males, $F(1,172) = 4.91$, $p < .05$). There was also a main effect for Sex, $F(1,173) = 14.68$, $p < .001$. Males ($M = 3.56$) evaluated their physical appearance more positively than females ($M = 3.02$).

Results of the analysis conducted on the importance subscale revealed that high self-monitors ($M = 4.06$) placed more importance on their physical appearance than low self-monitors ($M = 3.88$), $F(1,173) = 7.73$, $p < .01$. Also, females ($M = 4.05$) placed more importance on their physical appearance than did males ($M = 3.90$), $F(1,173) = 5.60$, $p < .05$. The two-way interaction was not significant, $F < 1$.

Analysis of the Behavior subscale revealed a marginal main effect for self-monitoring; high self-monitors ($M = 3.54$) engaged in more appearance-related behaviors than did low self-monitors ($M = 3.43$), $F(1,173) = 3.44$, $p < .07$. It was also shown that females ($M = 3.65$) engaged in more behaviors directed at their physical appearance than did males ($M = 3.25$), $F(1,173) = 21.63$, $p < .001$. The two-way interaction was not significant, $F < 1$.

Discussion

As predicted, high self-monitors placed more importance on their physical appearance than did low self-monitors. This finding extends the results of previous research (Snyder, Berscheid, & Glick, 1985; Omoto, DeBono, & Snyder, 1985) which demonstrated that high self-monitors placed

more emphasis on the appearance of others than did low self-monitors. Our results demonstrate that this focus can be extended to the self. Thus, the importance placed on physical appearance by high self-monitors may be more general than heretofore demonstrated. Further this result suggests that high self-monitors in contrast to low self-monitors may be more likely to develop negative affect if they perceive an actual-ideal physical appearance self-discrepancy.

Also as predicted, the results revealed that high self-monitoring males were particularly positive when evaluating their physical appearance. As suggested earlier, the fact that high self-monitoring males rated themselves as more attractive than low self-monitors, suggests an alternative explanation for Snyder et al.'s (1985) results. Consistent with the "matching phenomenon" (Berscheid et al., 1971), high self-monitoring males in Snyder et al.'s (1985) study may have chosen more physically attractive potential dating partners than did low self-monitoring males because they believed they were more physically attractive. Alternatively, because high self-monitors tended to engage in more appearance directed behaviors than low self-monitors, they may have believed through self-perception or self-justification processes that they were more attractive. High self-monitoring females however, did not evaluate themselves as being more physically attractive than low self-monitoring females. This finding may be attributable to the belief that behaviors directed at a woman's appearance are culturally expected and result in achieving, not surpassing, the cultural standards of attractiveness for women.

In support of previous research (Jackson et al., 1986) females placed more importance on their physical appearance and engaged in more behaviors directed at their appearance than did males. These findings appear to reflect (or "mirror") the cultural emphasis placed on appearance for females. As Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, (1986) have demonstrated, the standard of physical attractiveness, as portrayed in the mass media is more stringent for females than for males.

Overall, the results revealed individual differences in terms of the importance placed upon physical appearance. A next step in this line of research is to investigate whether the importance placed on physical appearance relates to negative affect if a perceived actual-ideal appearance self-discrepancy exists. In addition, the results also showed that the concerns of high self-monitors with physical appearance are more general than heretofore considered. Future research should examine the relationship between other personality variables, and how these variables may interact with gender in understanding self-perceived physical appearance.

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Table 1

Means for the Three Subscales of the BSRQ

	High Self-Monitors		Low Self-Monitors	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Appearance				
Evaluation	3.66 (.49)	3.11 (.66)	3.31 (.46)	3.31 (.55)
Importance	3.98 (.48)	4.13 (.50)	3.71 (.49)	3.95 (.43)
Behavior	3.30 (.61)	3.73 (.62)	3.14 (.55)	3.55 (.52)

Note. Values in parentheses are standard deviations.

Footnote

1. Examples of the BSRQ items are:

Physical Appearance.

Evaluation - Members of the other sex think I am attractive.

Importance - I would do whatever it takes to look better.

Behavior - I spend at least an hour a day dressing and grooming.

2. Multivariate and univariate analyses of variance performed on the three subscales of the BSRQ to examine order effects showed effects for Order only on the evaluation ratings. Subsequent simple effects tests revealed that high self-monitors, who received the BSRQ before the Self-Monitoring Scale, rated their physical appearance more favorably than low self-monitors who also received the BSRQ first, $F(1,173) = 7.46$, $p < .01$; and high self-monitors who received the BSRQ second, $F(1,173) = 13.01$, $p < .01$. The Self-Monitoring Scale may have acted as a prime for socially desirable responses resulting in lower scores in rating physical appearance for high self-monitors.